

SOTI Fellowship Program

Depth, Breadth, Creativity – Establishing Integrative Learning

Abstract

This paper discusses author's intervention into teaching and learning process designed in order to find out whether individual work of students on the shared problem (problem-based work) within the course makes students' learning experience more integrative, or whether such a context encourages students to link and juxtapose different topics and theories within the course and wider within the curriculum? Integrative learning is seen here from the angle of three aspects of students learning – depth, breadth and creativity. The research took place in the specific context of Belarusian University, EHU, located in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Introduction

The major goal of this paper is to document and discuss author's intervention into teaching and learning process designed in order to explore if individual work of informants (students of the European Humanities University) on the shared problem (which can be ascribed to the broader phenomenon of problem based work) within the course makes their learning experience more integrative? Or, alternatively, whether such a context encourages students to link and juxtapose different topics and theories within the course and wider within the curriculum? In this respect this research deals with SOTL debates on the issues of integrative learning and problem based work within the course. In the particular research settings problem based work presupposed each student's engagement with one particular social/cultural problem which had to be turned into sociological problem and approached from the perspective of

sociological theories and research purposes students learned in the class. Since this research presupposed the experimental aspect, the empirical part of this paper (data analysis itself) will be divided into two interconnected blocks. The first block discusses the phases of establishing the context for the problem-based group work and relies on the data obtained through ethnographic documentation of the steps teacher had to take in order to establish this structural framework and equally of the steps students were taking in order to adjust it. The second block presents the data collected from the students' course works (2 reaction papers and the presentations of these papers in class and a final essay of 1500-2500 words).

This research was conducted in fall semester of the academic year 2008-2009 in the environment of the fourth (final) year students from the department of *Social Science* at the European Humanities University. There are two tracks at this department: *Visual and Cultural Studies* and *Media and Communication Studies*. The course itself, *Sociology of Culture* (three credits, forty eight hours), was compulsory for the students of *Visual and Cultural Studies* track. However in practice the course was taught for eighteen students: thirteen 4-th year students from the *Visual and Cultural Studies* program and five 4-th year students from the other programs for whom this course was optional (four from *Mass Communication and Journalism* program and one from *Philosophy* program). Here it would be crucial to make explicit two context-specific traits of teaching and learning at this institution. EHU is the Belarusian University, which was closed in Minsk in 2004 for political reasons and in the year 2005 was re-opened in Lithuania (Vilnius) as a Lithuanian higher education institution. First, closure and re-opening of the institution means that most of the students are Belarusian citizens, who study and live in the foreign country and are supposed to return to their home country after the graduation. It equally implies that students have classes as intensive blocs (since the vast majority of the university teachers are not based in Vilnius) and not gradually every week. This course was taught in 3 intensive blocs (taking place in the time interval from November 2008 to February 2009) with the significant time intervals in between them. Two of taught classes were introductory lectures,

thirteen – seminars with students’ presentations based on the seminar readings and eight – presentations and discussions of students’ reaction papers and the final essay.

The major positive claim this paper unfolds: the fact that students work with a single problem makes their learning more integrative in a sense that they build up the content of their final essays basing on the empirical data and theories they were working with in their reaction papers. However it has also shown that the majority of students do not critically juxtapose neither empirical data they are using, nor the theories they are working with. Both elements of written assignments are used as simply supplementary to each other, while final essays are built up rather mechanically. The perspective of generalization of this conclusion would require the analysis of the compatible cases (with the possible adjustment of the design of intervention).

Grounding the research question

If to relate the posed research puzzle to Hutchings’ classification of the scholarships of teaching and learning then this study’s type is “visions of the possible”.¹ It should be pointed out that originally this research question might seem not so much discipline specific (the way research question is posed may lead to the impression that it could be any other social sciences and humanities course and department). However in order to make it more connected to the concrete discipline of the Sociology of Culture and to act according to the first ‘P’ of Shulman’s three rationales of teaching and learning scholarship (professionalism, pragmatism, policy²), problem-based work within the course inevitably needed to address the specificity of the discipline. More precisely it implied the situation when real-world problem and the ways of its’

¹ Hutchings, Pat. “Approaching the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning”. Available online: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/integrativelearning/index.htm> [downloaded: 25.09.2008]

² Shulman, Lee S. “From Minsk to Pinsk: Why A Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?” in *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. 1:1, pp. 49

solving by individual students – i.e. the aspects of the course which are related rather to its form – were significantly influenced by the content of the course and by the traits of the discipline in general. More precisely, apart from the fact that each student had to work on one previously set particular social/cultural issue within the entire course by writing three small reaction papers and a final essay at the end of the course, all students were expected to learn primarily how to turn a distinct social/cultural problem into sociological problem. Or, alternatively, by writing these papers students were supposed to learn how to tackle one particular social/cultural problem/issue (or, under-theorized social/cultural phenomenon) from the perspective of sociological theories and approaches they learn from the seminars based on the course readings. An indirect, yet at the beginning planned outcome of the intervention assumed by the researcher was that giving each student a certain problem to work with was expected to be certain glue, which had to keep together and to put into collaborative framework the individual students working with the same problem/issue. In the long run that meant that students were about to learn theories and concepts used in this academic field and equally to learn how to work with these concepts. Group work as a planned indirect outcome, in this vein, was basically about to intensify the individual work on this or that problem; to make the conceptual angle on it more focused; and to make the results of students' work more condensed and applicable (less declarative). If to relate this “vision of the possible” to the concrete data and the interpretation of data; then depth, breadth and creativity of students' works were supposed to be the indicators of the relative success or relative failure of the intervention.

Locating given research puzzle within the broader SOTL scholarship, it should be noted that the strategies of problem-based learning are resting on the assumption that students are to acquire not only substantial knowledge in their field, yet also to know how to apply this knowledge. Brownell and Daphne, who studied the implementation of problem-based learning within graduate management program, write that for the student teams, which faced the concrete

real world problem this problem was “the stimulus for subsequent learning”.³ Further on they talk about three specific outcomes of such learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Here cognitive outcomes are those, which increase knowledge, behavioral outcomes are those, which increase implementation skills, while affective outcomes are those, which increase awareness and sensitiveness.⁴ Taking into account the fact that this is only the first attempt of the researcher to study individual students’ work on the shared problems, and the fact that EHU students are initially less real world oriented than graduate management students at an American University initially the emphasis was located on the aspect of cognitive outcomes exclusively.

Besides research problem formulated this way makes the given study conceptually close to what is called integrative learning, i.e. the strategies of teaching and learning, which facilitate students to match the knowledge they acquired in one particular class with the information and skills they gain from the other classes and the other sources of the information. In Richard Gale the most prevalent pedagogies, which make such a way of getting and using information possible are service learning, problem-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning.⁵ In the case of my course problem-based learning and, to a lesser extent, collaborative learning (since individual work of students was expected to be performed on the shared sociological problems/issues) were supposed to be the structural components encouraging students to match different arrays (sources) and different kinds of the information (theories on the one hand and the information about the studied phenomena on the other hand) when learning sociology of culture. Quoting Gale, the approach is about “a pedagogy that asks students to work in small groups to investigate and solve teacher designed real world problems in the discipline they are studying”.⁶ Here it is important to note that usually SOTL scholars talk about macro-scale of cross-

³ Brownell, Judy and Daphne A. Jameson. “Problem-based learning in Graduate Management Education: An Integrative Model and Interdisciplinary Application” in *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 28, 2004, pp. 560

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 562

⁵ Gale, Richard A. “Fostering Integrative Learning through Pedagogy”. Available online: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/integrativelearning/index.htm> [downloaded: 25.09.2008]

⁶ *Ibid.*

disciplinary integrative learning.⁷ In my research I limit integrative learning almost exclusively to the ways, in which students make connections between the topics and readings within one course, while the issue of making connections between different courses and the different disciplines remains marginal. Due to the temporal limitations of this research, the major aim here is precisely dismantling the smaller scale of integrative learning through experimenting with the single course design, i.e. in the situation when three sociological issues students are to work with are formulated, while students are split into three small groups, within which they work rather individually.

Methodology and data gathering

Ross Miller writes that the most popular types of the assessment of students' integrative learning are papers, projects, presentations and portfolios.⁸ As it was already argued, since the research was to a great extent one of experimental nature, large part of evidence was taken from the documentation of the ways informants were on the one hand adapting, and on the other hand trying to adjust the course framework. At the same time in order to analyze the success of establishing the integrative learning itself – i.e. the degree to what students learn to connect the information they acquire in the framework of this distinct course – I gathered data through the collection and systematic analysis of students' writing assignments. These are two small reaction papers, one final essay of 1500-2500 words and the presentations of reaction papers (in the latter case observation is the only tool) in class. In the process of analysis of students' papers and presentation the focus lied on the four related aspects of these tasks.

⁷ Huber, Mary Taylor. "Fostering Integrative Learning through the Curriculum". Available online: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/integrativelearning/index.htm> [downloaded 25.09.2008]

⁸ Miller, Ross. "Fostering Integrative Learning through Assessment". Available online: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/files/elibrary/integrativelearning/index.htm> [downloaded: 25.09.2008]

The first aspect concerned *the breadth of the use of sociological theories*. In the case of this aspect, which makes the research more overtly discipline specific, researcher was simply documenting the number of academic publications from the syllabus readings students are using (quoting or paraphrasing) in each paper. Additionally the references to the academic sources which are not in the syllabus, yet are quoted or paraphrased by the students were counted. To put it differently, here teacher's interest lied in the purely quantitative aspects of the references to the academic sources in each student's work. The idea behind was to see whether throughout the course, i.e. from paper to paper, students are accumulating the knowledge of different theories (discussed in the course) they can use for approaching their problems or, in the simplest way, whether the sources they used in the reaction paper 2, they also use in the reaction paper 3 or in the final essay.

Second aspect, closely connected with the first one, was *the depth of the use of sociological theories*. That meant that I looked at the ways students work with the course readings and was documenting if they just show that they are acquainted with this or that theory or also juxtapose different theories, critically showing why and how a particular theory can be applied to a particular social/cultural problem, which theory should be advanced and which should be proved as inappropriate one. In the broader context of the research question posed this aspect is the pivotal one since it reveals the outcome of students' gradual work with different theories when dealing with one particular problem. The desired outcome would be the situation when the problem-based work within the course would make students more sensitive towards the theoretical constructs they are applying in their work. To put it in another way, it would make them not merely to accumulate the repertoire of theories which can be applied to certain empirical material within a relatively long-term venture [of working on one concrete issue], but also to accumulate the skills for confronting or juxtaposing the items of this repertoire.

Third aspect was about *the breadth of the information collected about the real world problem* students are working with. In this case I looked at the number of sources and the

thickness of the information students are giving in their papers before proceeding with their analysis and research decisions. In the broader disciplinary context it is possible to say that here I documented whether a student managed to achieve saturation, i.e. the situation when no additional data are needed in order to work conceptually with this or that defined phenomenon. In the case of any of three small groups such a defined phenomenon was supposed to be one of the aspects of the problem formulated by me for the whole group. Thus in order for a student to define the studied phenomenon, she or he was going to gradually work with through the entire course, meant to find the appropriate data about this phenomenon and to present the data in the written task. Here researcher's intention was to see whether a student is simply able to connect the theories we discuss with the real-world problem or under-theorized phenomenon.

Fourth aspect meant the *depth of the reception of the information collected about the real world problem*. In this instance researcher documented the ways students are presenting the information, which would define the phenomenon they are going to work with. The major researcher's interest was in whether students just quote sources one by one in order to give an impression that they were working with the sources or whether they try to be debate-oriented. In other words, the supposition was that in the first case the authors of written tasks would just quote some sources or share their observations in order merely to give an idea of what exactly their papers are about and in the second case they would be critically taking this information, showing strong and weak points of different sources, their inconsistencies and uncritical commonsense attitudes. In the perspective of integrative learning as an objective, this aspect is crucial one since it helps to trace the way students are filtering and processing the information about the real-world problem they face. Ideally the result of such gradual filtering and processing from paper to paper is the crystallization of a student's statement in his or her final essay.

Setting the context for the research

This section of the paper is substantially needed since the proposed format for work within the course is not usual for the academic environment where the research was conducted. Or, alternatively, taking into account the fact that the research itself was largely based on the experiment with the course framework it is necessary to start data analysis with the documentation of how this experiment actually took place on the classroom scale. This documentation is intended to show the specificity and hindrances of data collection. It is equally necessary to note that the data collection itself would be impossible without the relatively successful implementation of the experiment. In other words the data collected in the form of written assignments should be confronted with the context in which these assignments were set and the degree of the successfulness/unsuccessfulness of the structural framework in which these assignments were to be completed. As was already pointed out, this framework is the individual work on the shared social/cultural problems/issues which were supposed to be turned into sociological problems/issues; and the presentations and discussions of students' papers in class.

First it is necessary to make it clear, that originally this course implied three reaction papers, whereas only reaction papers two and three are taken here as the sources of data. The first reaction paper served as the assignment, which was supposed to establish the framework for problem-based work within the course. In more detail, teacher's decision was not to formulate in advance the real-world problems individual students are going to work with (originally the idea was to make four groups with 4-5 students in each). In contrast, the purpose was first (during two introductory lectures) to see what issues students are interested in (since those were the final year students it turned out that they were mostly interested in the issues central to their diplomas' topics), then to set these four problems/issues basing on the responses from the classroom, and only then to split students into groups. However, it appeared that only to explain students what does this format mean took teacher around 25 minutes during each of the two introductory lectures. Besides twice teacher needed to come back to this issue during the seminar meetings

when students were asking clarifying questions (these two interventions took around 7-10 minutes each). It should be also pointed out that not all the students took an active stance towards this innovation, i.e. not everyone was asking questions and commenting it. Only 7-8 out of 13 (this was the average of students present at the class meetings) did this, others seemed to be rather indifferent.

Hence, it is possible to state that the format itself was very new for the students (as it was already mentioned, at the beginning it was difficult to explain literally, what does it mean, to work on the single problem in all the papers throughout the class and to do it in relation to the work of the other individual students dealing with the same issue). Researcher faced the remarks like “why should I work on the same issue in the next reaction paper if I already did it in this one”. Students were literally noting that they have never worked in such a format. When teacher made a proposition to bound real-world problems to the topics of students’ diploma works, many of them were rather reluctant to discuss these topics in the broader context of the group, somehow claiming that this is not interesting to them. Some were saying that the course Sociology of Culture cannot help them much with working on the topics they are initially interested in. For instance, “I am interested in psychoanalysis and do not see how I can incorporate it into the context of this course and to exchange this knowledge with the others”. The evidence makes it possible to argue that the students of the research group are usually not ready for broader discussions of their individual work and prefer to stay anonymous, limiting the communication to: “individual student - teacher” scheme.

Further on, when the real-world problems students are going to work with were negotiated in the classroom, it appeared that it is difficult for the informants to formulate certain social/cultural problem and then to turn it into sociological problem. Most of them were referring to very broad issues, which apparently cannot be dealt with in this course. The examples are current financial crisis, montage in cinema, art photography, artistic performance, etc. This tendency also manifests itself in the fact that one of the most common questions from students

was: "I work with this or that theory, so to what kind of problem, you think, I can connect it?" When teacher was explaining that first you need to pick a phenomenon you want to analyze, then to gather some data about it, then to turn it into research question, and only then to see what concepts can help you to deal with this phenomenon, students were saying that they have never worked in this fashion. That makes it valid to suggest then that doctrinaire attitude to the information the analyzed group of informants get is a tendency, while students have problems when asked to focus their work and to deal with empirical material. Summing up the primary attempts to set the framework, it should be argued, that students were noting that they have never worked in such a format, although they also were denying that it will be a stress for them. When finally teacher had to make it clear to the group of students that this must be the format of the course and that they cannot choose any other format, they agreed. That means it is quite possible to start introducing such experimental forms of teaching.

In this respect teacher had to make two further clarifications, which are necessary to take into consideration while analyzing data and deciding what do these data represent. First, teacher explicitly said that this way of learning is a good way to accumulate knowledge for further use, i.e. it is an opportunity to start becoming an expert in a certain field. And, second, in order to increase students' engagement, teacher explicitly said that they, for instance, can try to incorporate the knowledge they get and the assignments they fulfill within this course into their diploma projects. An important point was also that teacher explicitly announced that the material students accumulate while writing reaction papers, they can also incorporate into their final course projects (essays). In this regard, by implication, teacher/researcher partially made the hypothesis of this study overt to informants/students. However, still it did not make it totally clear to the students what does it mean to work on a real-world problem. It is thus necessary to say that it took really more time than was expected to explain informants the new format of teaching and learning, i.e. the research settings. Moreover in the specific context of the given University this is especially problematic since any course is taught in intensive blocks and the

students are likely to turn their attention to something else when a lecturer finishes his or her block and leaves, while students need to deal with another course intensively.

Basing on all this, at the stage of the first reaction paper the decision was taken simply to split students into groups (according to their interests) and only then to check their papers and to formulate real-world problems (proceeding from the best papers in each group). Four broad topics, constituting small groups were: a) consumption, b) art market in Belarus, c) body and bodily practices, d) city. The analysis of the first assignment (which as it was already argued should be treated as pilot analysis only) made it possible to draw some preliminary conclusions. Firstly, the weak point of 9 out of 11 papers submitted was the absence or the insufficiency of references students are supposed to make to the sources where they find the information about their problems. It, hence, proves the supposition formulated above that students are not used to work with empirical material. It was supplemented by the lack of critical reception of the information students are using: in none of 11 papers authors tried to juxtapose different sources of information they use, or to confront different arguments related to the problem they are working with. Although 10 out of 11 papers were developed in a strong relation to the theories discussed during the seminars which took place before the first assignment, the degree and the adequacy of this relation varies from paper to paper. It can be however argued that this aspect is the only requirement of the course concept, which was rather successfully fulfilled at the stage of the first reaction paper. The use of the sociological concepts in 3 out of 10 papers (as was mentioned, only 10 were developed in a strong relation to the discussed theories) was arbitrary in relation to the problem students are working with. 2 of these papers were based on the strong student's personal preconception about the analyzed problem. And remaining 1 was based on a strong doctrinaire attitude. 7 other papers had these drawbacks too, but to a lesser degree. In this vein it would be valid to argue that these particular students are much more comfortable to be working with theories themselves, which are usually hardly disciplined (within students' works) by concrete empirical data.

Basing on the experience researcher got during the first teaching period, the decision was taken to keep only 3 shared problems students have to work with individually. It was justified by the observation that since there are only 10-12 actively working (i.e. attending classes) students out of 18, there was a certain risk identified that only let us say 2 out of 4 students per each issue will be actively working while others will simulate the work. In this sense the very concept of problem-based work on a collectively shared problem would fail to happen. The expectation was that when there are 6 people in each group it must be safer that the work will be dynamic. Second, after more thorough analysis of what are the problems students are interested in, and the generalization of these data, three problems for the course were invented (researcher decided not to invent something totally new so as not to frustrate students), while students were split into three groups with 6 individual students in each. Here each of the members of the group had to analyze a concrete case, yet, the result of this analysis had to be a well-grounded response to the question posed for the entire group. Moreover the members of each group were asked not to repeat the arguments of the other group members. The space for the cooperation between members of the groups was verbally (as opposed to structurally) encouraged to be found beyond the classroom, while the main space for the cooperation within the classroom had to be the presentations of students' reaction papers (two classes for the presentation of reaction paper 2, two classes for the presentation of reaction paper 3 and two classes for the presentation of essay draft). The issues around which individual work within three groups' was expected to be structured and were as follows: 1. the poor development of Belarusian music industry, 2. the difference between shopping centers in Vilnius and in Minsk, and 3. the potential of Web 2.0 for the crystallization of the new configurations of power and of social activism in Belarusian context.⁹ The questions formulated for three groups this way were justified for first, they are

⁹ The description of 1 issue:

The main focus of this theme will be the local specificity of Belarusian music industry, expressed in its artifacts, in the perception of these artifacts by Belarusian and international audience, and also in the way it is regulated by the state (censorship, the policies of Belarusian media, etc.). The main problem to be solved by the members of this small group – for what reasons does this segment of Belarusian culture is poorly developed (if it is poorly developed), and also which 'variables' are needed for increasing its competitiveness? Each of the members of this

discipline specific (i.e. it would be possible to unpack these themes working in the disciplinary field of the sociology of culture) and, second, they would presuppose problem solving (in this concrete case turning a distinct social problem into sociological problem).

After this primary framework for teaching and learning was established, the new processes that hindered the implementation of the experiment and hence the data collection emerged. Firstly, only around half of the students were submitting their assignments in time. In this connection the planned schedule (along which the degree to which informants' learning is integrative was supposed to be measured) was violated. It is possible to judge that it is not specific to this particular format of the course – researcher was observing this situation in the cases of the other courses taught and discussed it with his colleagues who had similar problems. Although from the very beginning it was fixed that after each three seminars (six hours) students will have to submit their reaction papers basing on the theories discussed during the seminars and to present/discuss these papers during two next classes (four hours), they did not manage to make it on time. In reality only two students came to class with the written reaction paper 2 and only one student came to class with the written reaction paper 3. All the rest were coming to class merely with their ideas (usually pretty blurred ones) and still needed to discuss these ideas with teacher (and to a lesser extent with other students). In such a respect classes with students'

group might analyze a concrete case, yet, the result of this analysis MUST be a well-grounded response to the question set for the ENTIRE group.

The description of 2 issue:

The main focus of this theme will be the difference in the value (qualitative and quantitative differences of the organization of the interior space of the shops, as well as their role on the scale of the entire city) and in the functioning (in terms of the sort of consumers they create) of the hypermarkets in Minsk and Vilnius. The main problem to be solved by the members of this small group – which social and economic 'variables' constitute this difference (if it really exists), and also how do they co-work with the local cultural patterns of buying and selling in hypermarkets of Minsk and Vilnius? Each of the members of this group might analyze a concrete case, yet, the result of this analysis MUST be a well-grounded response to the question set for the ENTIRE group.

The description of 3 issue:

The main focus of this theme is Belarusian Internet as the platform for the crystallization of the new kind of relations between power (in broad sense) and social activism. More concrete empirical material for this issue are blogs (like Livejournal) and social networks (like Facebook). The main problem to be solved by the members of this small group – in which way the emergence of the Web 2.0 technology and the use of it by Belarusian users (with their particular everyday culture, values and political agenda) reformulate the terms of power and of social activism specific for Belarusian context? Each of the members of this group might analyze a concrete case, yet, the result of this analysis MUST be a well-grounded response to the question set for the ENTIRE group.

presentations looked rather like tutorials and not as proper students presentations. It would be accurate to say that teacher's experience of working with these students suggested that seminar meetings are not enough for students to figure out what their reaction papers will be about. At least 2 hours of tutorials are needed after each block of seminars in order student's reaction papers would be produced in time and meeting course requirements.

Crucially, this situation significantly reduced the potential of group work since the lack of 'real presentations' made reaction papers less debate-oriented. It is possible to say that only one group (one concerned with the theme of Belarusian music industry) was working in classroom fully as the group, i.e. arguing and asking clarifying questions to each other (equally with the constant discussions and negotiations beyond and in the classroom). At the same time, those students, who were working more closely with their colleagues (from the group concerned with the theme of Belarusian music industry), were the most significant contributors to the discussions of the other students' projects. They were actively commenting other students' works and criticizing declarative statements, what teacher never systematically experienced before while teaching other courses.

Analysis of written assignments

At this stage it is necessary to make clear, that in the perspective of the research question and the strict settings in which empirical study itself had to take place, it is possible to treat the assignments of 12 students only (out of 18 students which subscribed for the course). The explanation of it is that out of initially present 18 students 3 dropped the class and 3 wrote all of their papers at the very end just before the final deadline for the essay. The latter ones got lower grades and still passed, yet their papers are not considered within this analysis since they do not show even hypothetical progress of student's work from paper to paper (although two out of

these three students participated in the presentations of their colleagues and final discussions). In brief, it needs to be said that those three just wrote their final essays and then just mechanically cut them into reaction papers to be submitted separately. One of the 12 students whose written assignments are analyzed submitted only reaction paper 2, while reaction paper 3 was submitted together with the essay (as the part of the essay and hence it is not analyzed). It should be also pointed out that all the students, whose assignments are analyzed, managed to work on the same real-world problem in both reaction papers and the essays. Yet the degree of connectivity between different theories studied within the course varies from paper to paper. The data of students written assignments themselves structured in the form of a table and coded in accordance with the methodological premises presented in the appropriate section are placed in appendix (see Table 1). Below is the condensed and still rather descriptive analysis of those data, which makes it possible if not to solve the formulated research puzzle, then at least to reframe it conceptually (as confronted with the prevalent SOTL debates and broader values of teaching and learning scholarship), to ground it in the empirical material and to formulate possible further directions of critical work within the given research purpose localized on the classroom scale.

As data presented in the table suggest in the most general fashion, the progress within the work of individual students in terms of reflexive and creative integration of learned theoretical approaches and individually studied empirical material is unlikely to be connected with the structural context in which students were proposed to work. In other words hypothetical outcome of the establishing the teaching and learning settings described in the previous section happened only to a lesser and more predictable extent. More precisely, the advantages of the suggested mode of learning vary from informant to informant and are strongly connected to students' individual traits. The claim would be that the skills and motivations of some students make their learning more integrative than of others, while their work documented in temporal perspective (i.e. working on reaction paper 2, reaction paper 3 and the essay) does not show any regularities of growing connectivity (and reflexivity concerning what students are connecting) of theoretical

approaches and accumulated empirical material from paper to paper. In the overwhelming majority of the individual trajectories within the course students are likely to end up with an insight, which they consider to be appropriate and comfortable for writing course essays, and center their further works around this insight rather mechanically and uncritically.

Further on four aspects showing the evidence of the integrative learning within a single course are dismantled one by one. The first aspect – *the breadth of the use of sociological theories* – which was about the degree to which students are active in working with the theoretical approaches they learn within the course turns to be the most positive in relation to study's hypothesis. As was already mentioned in methodology section, this aspect was measured in purely quantitative terms, i.e. the number of references students make to the sources from and beyond the syllabus was counted. The predictability of success of this aspect is connected with the fact that this indicator of learning is on the one hand discipline specific (work with the academic sources is the basic requirement students are to meet in order to pass the course) and on the other hand with the fact that students seem to be the most familiar with this mode of work within the course (as the data driven from observations and presented in the previous section suggest). Notably it is possible to observe that most of the students (7 informants) were working with a single source in each of their reaction papers and then just presented those sources in their final essays (three of these 7 informants in their final essays also quoted sources which were not in the syllabus). Another 3 students failed to make reference to any sources in some of their reaction papers and put some only in the final essays. One more student did not submit one of the two reaction papers at all. And finally, one student was actually accumulating sources (s)he was working with from reaction paper 2 (2 sources) to reaction paper 3 (3 sources) and essay (6 sources).

The second aspect of teaching and learning – *the depth of the use of sociological theories* – was introduced in order to measure the consecutive work of students with different theories (mainly from the syllabus, but also beyond) when dealing with one particular problem. Here

juxtaposition was expected here to be the main action to be performed by students and observed by the researcher in their written assignments. It would be reasonable to say that it is this aspect of learning theories, which makes it possible to distinguish a professional from the layman. Basing on the analysis of the data presented in the table it should be argued that this constituent of the hypothesis rather failed: none of the students really critically juxtaposed different theories from the quoted sources neither in the reaction paper (here it was unlikely by definition, since, as it was pointed out above, only one student out of twelve was accumulating sources from reaction paper 2 to reaction paper 3), nor in the final essays (in this case 10 out of 12 essays were just mechanically discussing sources students were working with, while in 2 remaining papers were nothing to juxtapose since each of these two papers was based on one source only). In this respect the way students were building up their final essays should be described as a mechanical one: different concepts and theoretical constructs were merely uncritically strung to each other in the final essays.

As for the third aspect – *the breadth of the information collected about the real world problem* – which was needed in order to answer the interim research question if informants are encouraged to actively work with empirical material in the analyzed settings, it is possible to observe that it was semi-successful. More precisely, only one of the students enriched his/her work (reaction paper 3 as confronted with reaction paper 2 and the essay as confronted with reaction papers 2 and 3) with new empirical material. The work of four students was based on the stable rather well-grounded discussion of the analyzed phenomena referring to the same empirical material in all three assignments. In two papers only the reaction paper 2 was based on the well grounded discussion of the analyzed issue (in the reaction paper 3 and the final essay these informants failed to do this). Two more student projects started with the arbitrary empirical construction of the analyzed issue with the reference to the empirical material, yet in the reaction paper 3 and in the essay this drawback was overcome. In one more paper these drawbacks were at place in both reaction papers, but the whole work was slightly improved in the final essay. In

two remaining cases, informants failed to ground the discussion of their phenomena by the references to the empirical data. Hence the conclusion to be drawn from this array of data is that the group of informants analyzed encounter problems when are asked to achieve and advance saturation when collect and use empirical material for their course works. On the other hand, it should be noticed that when students are asked to have empirical material as a necessary part of their assignments, they are able to meet this requirement, although rather mechanically (as was pointed out, only one of the students was enriching his/her progressing work with empirical material).

Finally, the fourth aspect, *depth of the reception of the information collected about the real world problem*, was about to reveal to what extent students are critical and creative while working with their empirical material, i.e. choosing and filtering the sources of data and confronting the information these sources represent. In this respect in the case of five students' works there were no attempts to juxtapose the data they work with in none of the written assignments. In two cases the data are juxtaposed in all the written assignments, while one of these two informants was literally progressing with this juxtaposition by enriching empirical data from assignment to assignment. In the case of one more informant, there is the attempt to do this juxtaposition in all these papers, but it is too imprecise. In three more cases rather successful attempts to juxtapose the data are at place only in the final essays, and not in the reaction papers. Finally, in the last case, there is no juxtaposition in reaction paper 2, but there is in the reaction paper 3 and the essay. Therefore this crucial aspect of integrative learning as operationalized in this concrete research cannot be called fully successful either.

Conclusions

Therefore it is possible to briefly sum up the issues analyzed throughout the paper. The most durable positive conclusion, which can be drawn from the discussed research is that the necessity for the students to work on a single (and shared) problem throughout the entire course does make their learning more integrative, but merely in a sense that it makes it possible for the individual students to compile their final course essays from the reaction papers (or, any other smaller assignments) they have previously written. This compilation is much more successful and stable when it is about theoretical constructs and the sources from the syllabus quoted. The use of the empirical material remains rather discrete and in vast majority of the cases is not progressively enriched. Besides, as the data discussed in the last section indicate, for the vast majority of informants the structural framework of the course did not imply more active, critical and creative juxtaposition of neither empirical data informants need in order to work with their issues, nor of concepts and theoretical constructs they are adhering to. Both former and latter constituents of written assignments are used as supplementary to each other, while final assignments are shaped rather mechanically. The general lack of the juxtaposition of both theoretical constructs and the empirical material reduces the creativity in students' works. This conclusion still needs further verifications which would desirably require more analyses of compatible cases, where the probable adjustment of the design of intervention would be desirable too. Besides, as it was already said, when setting the context of the course teacher has revealed the research hypothesis to the informants, what makes the experiment itself partially biased and by means of this reduces the significance of the progress students have made.

The results vary from student to student and are hardly to be analyzed as the distinct group's results. As for the potential of group work itself (it was one of the primary research's agenda), it is possible to say that its effects were better graspable in the classroom discussions.

Students from the group whose members were communicating more among each other (group 1), were also more active and less declarative and therefore real world problem sensitive (i.e. referring to or criticizing each other) during discussions. The most positive practical conclusion here is that the time of the discussion of students papers should be extended from presentation classes to tutorial classes or even to seminar classes. Basing on this analysis it is possible to argue that the structural framework of the variation of individual problem-based work on the shared problem within the course was not smoothly implemented in the context where research was done (European Humanities University). As it has been also shown, students who were taking the course in the fall semester 2008-2009 turned to be rather reluctant when were asked to work on certain real world problems and to base their papers on the empirical material. It has been taken into account when the data were actually interpreted.

Appendix

Students	Indicators of learning	Reaction paper 2	Reaction paper 3	Final essay
student 1 (group 3)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	3 sources from syllabus + 2 other sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
student 2 (group 3)	Breadth of the use of theories	2 sources	3 sources	6 sources (all from syllabus)
	Depth of the use of theories	no real juxtaposition (rather supplementary)	no real juxtaposition (rather supplementary)	no real juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon
	Depth of the reception of information	data are juxtaposed	data are juxtaposed	data are juxtaposed
student 3 (group 3)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	3 sources from syllabus + 1 other source
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	rather declarative
	Breadth of the information	superficial	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	well discussed
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
student 4	Breadth of the use of	1 source	1 source	3 sources from syllabus

(group 3)	theories			
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	well grounded	not really grounded	not really grounded
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
student 5 (group 3)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	4 sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
	Breadth of the information	well grounded	well grounded	well grounded
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
student 6 (group 1)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source		1 source
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition		no juxtaposition
	Breadth of the information	well grounded		well grounded
	Depth of the reception of information	Data are taken from different sources, but are not really no juxtaposed		Data are taken from different sources and are juxtaposed
student 7 (group 1)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	4 sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	a lot of material is presented, but rather chaotically	a lot of material is presented, but rather chaotically	a lot of material is presented, but rather chaotically

	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	there is the attempt to juxtapose them
student 8 (group 1)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	2 sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	well grounded	well grounded (enriched)	well grounded (enriched)
	Depth of the reception of information	different data are well juxtaposed and are reworked critically	different data are well juxtaposed and are reworked critically (enriched)	different data are well juxtaposed and are reworked critically (enriched)
student 9 (group 1)	Breadth of the use of theories	1 source	1 source	3 sources from syllabus + 1 other source
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	quite focused use of data	not focused use of data	some material is presented, but not focused enough and rather arbitrarily picked
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition
student 10 (group 2)	Breadth of the use of theories	nothing	2 sources	2 sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	nothing	nothing	analysis of photos taken by a student
	Depth of the reception of information	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	there is a comparison
student 11 (group 2)	Breadth of the use of	nothing	nothing	1 source

	theories			
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition, but theory is well incorporated into analysis
	Breadth of the information	generalization of well-known facts	generalization of well-known facts	generalization of well-known facts
	Depth of the reception of information	not precise	not precise	not precise
student 12 (group 2)	Breadth of the use of theories	nothing	2 sources from syllabus + 1 other source	2 sources
	Depth of the use of theories	no juxtaposition	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)	no juxtaposition (rather supplementary)
	Breadth of the information	not grounded	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon	grounded discussion of certain phenomenon
	Depth of the reception of information	chaotic	well juxtaposed	well juxtaposed

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